

Supporting English and Literacy for Primary Students

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Learning to read and write English is more complex today than when you were at primary school. Some things are the same, but you won't remember how you learnt to read or write because as an adult you have absorbed these skills into your daily habits. Reading includes understanding the meaning and the mechanics of written words, images, spoken words, moving images and other texts. A text is a piece of communication and can be either in one mode, such as writing, or can be in more than one mode, i.e. multimodal, such as a picture book or an Internet webpage. In this flyer I will provide some tips for working with your child with written texts. Remember you are not their teacher. It is important to not make it a battle of wills but to support their love of literacy – for reading and writing.

How do I help my child with literacy?

Supporting your child's reading

For children who find reading a challenge, or even for those that enjoy reading a book, it is often a struggle to get children to read at home. Try to encourage your child to read. A catalogue, a magazine, a documentary, a webpage, a game are all texts and require different skills of reading to understand their meaning, what you would know as comprehension.

How much time for reading depends on the age of your child: 5 minutes may be too long for one child and not enough for another; keep the time manageable – better to encourage reading for less time than argue over how long they 'should' read.

Reading out loud

For young children, reading out loud is a school practice usually undertaken in small groups but there is also time in class when they read silently to themselves and listen to the teacher read. Reading out loud can be very challenging because children have to read (decode) the word and perform (verbalise) the words they read. Choose a text that your child can easily read and is interesting for them: a book, a webpage, a magazine, or they could listen to a book being read online, such as Story Online or LibriVox. Your child could also practice reading out loud to a sibling, a pet, a stuffed toy, doll. They could audio-record themselves and play it for you or read to a relative via zoom.

Shared reading and joint reading

Encouraging young children to read can include shared reading and joint reading of a book, or a webpage or other text. Shared reading is usually a regular or even daily activity in class and at home this usually occurs before bedtime but could be first thing in the morning or after showers. Otherwise, reading can become something that falls off the family to do list. As a proficient reader, you would read to your child and build their interest and love of literature. Generally, these books are stories – also known as narratives, with characters, which encounter a problem, that has to be solved by the end of the text. For those of you working – time can slip away to do this so try to make it a routine for the whole family.

To encourage your child to read, you could jointly read the book: one word, one sentence, one paragraph or one page each, taking turns. During and after reading, talk about the events and what happened, ask questions so you are showing your child that reading is making sense of the text not just reading the words (often called "barking at the print"). You might ask your child to find words they know or are learning in class in the text as you read.

Supporting your child's writing

Learning to write will be 'slower' than learning to read. We are not all writers, though we know how to write, so again it is important to support your child with writing. Writing a literary text, such as a narrative (story) or character description, is more challenging than writing a factual text, such as a recount or information report because it's easier to find facts and scaffold factual writing than it is to create an imaginative text. Literary texts demand a greater knowledge of vocabulary and ways to engage the reader.



Turn a recount into a narrative

Children write recounts of events from the early years of school. It is the text that includes facts: who, what, where, when (in the first paragraph), followed by what happened (aka the events). Because the event has already happened, e.g. The Bike Ride, Our Walk, they are written in past tense i.e. rode, saw, skipped etc. Any event can be the topic of a recount. A recount can also be the basis of a narrative (story) by adding a problem that could have occurred and how that problem was solved. Your child can think up a problem, such as, s/he fell into a large puddle/stream/pond during the walk, or teddy fell into a huge hole or you can suggest something to them, such as a large tree fell down and blocked the path. Now they have to work out how to get over the problem, i.e. resolve the complication (problem). And finally, we all went home. For older children encourage them to use more 'interesting' vocabulary: shrieked or whispered (other words than 'said') - perhaps even introduce them to a thesaurus.

Jointly constructing a text

It's ok to work together to write a text as well. Your child can provide the words and you can provide the handwriting expertise as well as spelling knowledge. For many struggling writers, this can be a wonderful support strategy to support them through frustrations they may encounter when constructing a text such as struggling to put the words down they are thinking when using a pencil /pen and paper or typing in a

word document. It can be incredibly painful to watch your child struggling with the mechanics of writing – forming the letters, finding the letter on the keyboard – and lose interest, feel bad about themselves and forget what they were going to write. Your assistance will scaffold their learning to write: helping with ideas or helping with new vocabulary or a gentle prompt regarding punctuation. Try not to forget to also include positive reinforcement in your language too in acknowledging their efforts/improvement.

To spell or not to spell?

That is the question! As a parent or carer, it is not necessary to always insist that your child work out how to spell every word: what does it begin with? what letter/s make the 'ee' sound, what can you hear at the end? While these are all useful to get your child to 'have a go', it is also ok to spell the word for them as they write. It is quicker and helps them to keep the flow of what they are writing. If it is a word they should know, such as commonly used words or words they use regularly or have been on a spelling list, you could remind them they DO know how to spell that word. If your school has a particular phonics program and you can see that some phonemes are a focus, then you can connect your child to these.

